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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief description of a token reinforcement system developed for a kindergarten language class in the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP). Visual reinforcers (colored plastic tabs) were placed next to the names of individual children (each time they made a correct response) on a large chart in the front of the room. Five or more correct responses during a session entitled the child to a "good work aware" (a piece of paper) which, in turn, enabled the child to "take a run" outdoors. A resultant increase in the total amount of reinforcement (verbal and non-verbal) given to individual children during the lesson was noted. (CM)

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The Kamehameha Early Education Program

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program of The Kamehameha Schools/Bernice P. Bishop Estate. The mission of KEEP is the development, demonstration, and dissemination of methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children. These activities are conducted at the Ka Na'i Pono Research and Demonstration School, and in public classrooms in cooperation with the State Department of Education. KEEP projects and activities involve many aspects of the educational process, including teacher training, curriculum development, and child motivation, language, and cognition. More detailed descriptions of KEEP's history and operations are presented in Technical Reports #1-4.

Abstract

This report is of special interest because it demonstrates how a token reinforcement system should be developed by careful articulation with the lesson itself. Au's system is an organic whole with the lesson; the tokens themselves, their method of delivery, and the criteria for earning them, all grow out of the teaching situation.

Au's discussion of the side-advantages of the token system are also interesting, as is her emphasis on the fact that tokens are an aid to, not a substitute for, teaching.

Any teacher considering the creation of a token system could read this report with profit--not to imitate the system itself, necessarily--but as an example of how to go about creating one.

Roland G. Tharp
Ronald Gallimore

Technical Report #11

The Development of a Token Reinforcement System for a Specific Lesson

Kathryn Au

While I was teaching daily language lessons to the KEEP kindergarten class, I noticed the generally favorable response that the children gave to my numerous verbal praises. Although I was spending a lot of time praising individual children for specific responses, I still was not able to provide as much reinforcement to as many children as seemed appropriate. The problem that I faced was devising a way of indicating to more children that I was pleased with their performance, without having to provide a constant stream of verbal praise.

The obvious solution seemed to be to use visual means to indicate to the children that they were performing well. For this purpose, I placed a large chart in the front of the room with a card showing each child's name. Each time a child was called on and made a correct response, I put a colored plastic tab next to his name. A standard was set for the children: on days when they made 5 or more correct responses they would receive a piece of paper, a "good work award", showing the number of correct responses that they had made in each session. On most days, those children who received good work awards (see Technical Report #12), were allowed to leave the classroom to take a "run" outdoors.

In the beginning, I paired the awarding of each tab with a praise statement, but as time went on I often placed the tab next to the child's name on the chart without saying anything. In this way, I felt that I was able to provide more reinforcement to individual children.

The children responded to the system very well and quickly learned to count the number of tabs received by their classmates. If one child received an exceptionally large number of tabs, he was the object of much admiration. If a child's attention began to wander, I could often use a reference to the tabs as a verbal cue: "I see that Johnny already has four tabs. He's probably going to get a good work award (GWA) today, if I can call on him one more time." Usually, the child would quickly begin to attend again and raise his hand in order to be called upon.

After the system was established, the children had to follow a definite series of steps in order to be awarded a tab. A child had to first be sitting in his place in the circle. Second, he had to be attending to the teacher in order to know what response was required. Then, if he knew the answer to the question or how to perform the task, he raised his hand. Finally, if called upon, he had to provide the correct response.

One unfortunate part of the whole system was that, while many children would raise their hands, only one or two could be called upon at a time. I checked periodically, and if certain children had not been receiving GWA's, I would make a special effort to call on those children. This practice did not solve the problem entirely--a problem, probably inherent, in all large group teaching situations--but it served to remind me to pay more attention to the quieter children.

A ranking of the children in the class, according to average number of correct responses per lesson, based on a period of fourteen school days, is shown in the table below.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CORRECT RESPONSES PER SESSION

DURING A 14-DAY PERIOD

BOYS	GIRLS
5.0	6.5
4.9	5.7
4.9	5.0
4.8	5.0
4.7	4.9
4.6	4.8
3.8	4.8
3.1	4.7
2.4	4.4
1.7	4.4
1.6	3.9
1.4	3.8
	3.8
	3.1
	2.8
	1.0

Some children who did not excel in other academic activities are found near the top of the list.

There are several advantages to this reinforcement system. The children are able to see how they are doing as the lesson progresses, and there is no mystery about who is going to get rewarded at the end or why some are being rewarded, while others are not. The system was not too complex for the children to understand. On several occasions, I forgot to place a tab by a child's name, and was immediately reminded to do so by members of the class.

The teacher is also able to tell from a glance at the chart how

various children are doing. If she sees that someone has not yet made any correct responses, she is alerted to pay more attention to him to see why. A child may not be attending, but sitting quietly and daydreaming, and the teacher is reminded to prompt that child to raise his hand and participate in the lesson.

Finally, as originally intended, it did seem that there was an increase in the total amount of reinforcement, verbal and non-verbal, given to individual children during the lesson.